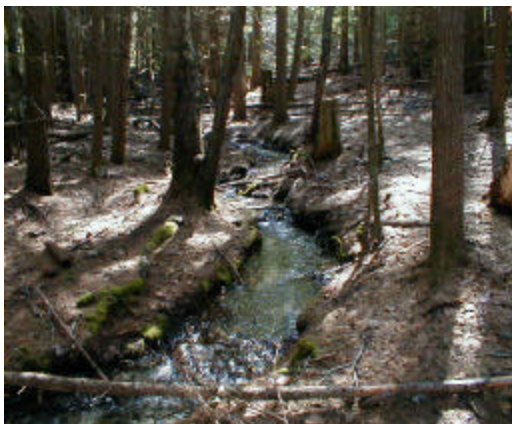


Farragut Spring Closed; Athol Water Filling Station Opened

An old water system, favored by users, is slated for shutdown

“Unless six waterhaulers can form an association and secure a grant that would pay for an alternate water source, they will soon have no water at all,” reported an article in the *Coeur d’Alene Press*¹ on November 1, 2000. The article referred to plans by the Idaho Department of Lands to close down Farragut Spring.



Left, Farragut Spring flows from a mountainside near Buttonhook Bay on the southeastern end of Lake Pend Oreille.

Below, Since World War II, the Farragut Spring flume system had been the only source of water for many area residents.



At Farragut Spring, a small hand-built flume system brought spring water from a creek to users, with no filtration or treatment. The flume system piped water from the spring to an open area where users could drive a truck carrying a water tank right under the end of the

¹ Andrew Biscoe, “Athol waterhaulers look for alternatives,” *Coeur d’Alene Press*, November 1, 2000, page A1.

pipe. Two to three hundred people were getting water from the spring-fed flume system for household use and livestock watering. According to news stories,² the flume system had been in use since World War II, but the creek had been used for drinking water as early as 1910. The system was a good example of the ingenuity and resourcefulness of area residents who had, over the years, created a water system that served their needs well. For many of the users, drilling private wells was not a realistic option because in that area wells have to be very deep, making them too expensive. Most of the users believed Farragut Spring water was safe to drink because of its remote location.

Farragut Spring water is found to be unsafe

The water was not filtered or disinfected, and when the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) tested it earlier that year, they found coliform bacteria. The water system did not meet state drinking water quality standards, and it seemed likely the coliform would be an ongoing problem because of wild animals, cattle, and hikers near the creek. The water was considered unsafe by DEQ, who informed the Idaho Department of Lands, the property owner, of their findings. It was decided the system had to be closed down to protect public health. The Department of Lands announced this decision in May 2000.

Alternatives are sought

Steve Tanner and the drinking water staff in the DEQ Coeur d'Alene Regional Office, together with the Department of Lands, held public meetings to discuss the shutdown and try to find alternatives for creating a water supply. They didn't want to shut down the system with no notice and no alternatives, because this was the sole water supply for most of the users.

Some of the users tried to form an association in order to qualify for grants that might be available to build a better water system. Judy Brownson spearheaded this effort with the help of a few other water users, but no association ever got off the ground.

Finally, in November 2000, the Department of Lands shut down the system by dismantling it and digging "tank traps" (deep trenches across the road, far too deep to drive a pickup through) to prevent access. The tank traps were considered necessary because some users had said they'd continue getting water from the spring even if the pipe and flume system were taken apart.

When the system was shut down, many people had no water. Some bought water from the city of Athol, who would fill any size container from a fire hydrant for \$3.00. For some who didn't have large tanks, this was a financial problem. It was also a logistical problem for those who worked regular business hours as those were the only times the city could fill containers. They had been able to get water from the spring on weekends or at night.

After Farragut Spring was closed, the staff at DEQ continued their efforts to find or create a water delivery system that would be safe and would meet the needs of the Farragut Spring users. Steve Tanner said, "... it's important to help [the Farragut Spring users] find an

² Andrew Biscoe, "Athol waterhaulers look for alternatives," *Coeur d'Alene Press*, November 1, 2000, page A1; Zaz Hollander, "Families may lose their water source," *The Spokesman-Review*, June 17, 2000, section B, page B1.

adequate safe supply that is affordable to them.” The DEQ Coeur d’Alene Regional Office paid for mailings from Judy Brownson and some other users to area residents, notifying them of the problem and of the advantages of forming an association to create a new water system. Staff from the DEQ office and the Department of Lands held meetings to explain the problem and explore solutions. The information they presented was met with open hostility more than once. They also approached Farragut State Park and Timberlake Fire District to see if either would create a water filling station. The park was willing to sell water, and proposed to use some county land outside the park (deed restrictions prevented putting a facility inside the park) if the North Kootenai Water District would fund, construct, and operate the facility. The water district pursued the project, identifying likely grant funding from the Idaho Department of Commerce. (This funding was not used because an alternative was found; see below). In the meantime, DEQ also asked the city of Athol if it would create a water filling station, but the city was initially not interested.

A suitable alternative is created

Eventually, the city of Athol discovered it was feasible for them to build a system similar to what the park had investigated. The city donated the land, and DEQ Director Steve Allred approved a \$50,000 grant and also helped identify a \$40,000 Rural Development Administration Emergency Community Water Assistance Grant. The project was completed in 2001.



The Hanks family fills their water tank at a new, coin-operated water filling station. This station is now in operation next to the Athol City Hall. To fill a tank, the user swings the rigid pipe out from the top of the building, directs the flexible green hose into the tank, then starts the water flow with the coin-operated system. This station supplies safe drinking water to waterhaulers who can conveniently and affordably fill 450-gallon tanks like this, or other containers, with safe, clean water for use at their homes.

Now, there is a water filling station next to the Athol City Hall, dispensing clean, safe water. It is coin-operated, affordable at 25¢ for 100 gallons, and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It was entirely grant-funded, but more important was the dedication of several people to get safe water to area residents in a way that meets their needs. When Judy Brownson “asked . . . if we could get water at 3 in the morning,” the answer was “Yes.”³

³ Andrew Biscoe, “Athol nods water system,” *Coeur d’Alene Press*, March 7, 2001.